SOUTH AFRICA.

TELEGRAMS CONCERNING THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH.

Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty.

Bx. K-34

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Telegrams concerning the Siege of Ladysmith.

Messages between Sir G. White and Sir R. Buller.

From General Sir G. White to General Sir R. Buller.

(*Received at Estcourt and telegraphed to Pietermaritzburg, 4th December.*)

No. 20 P, 30th November. Flashing signals clouds seen last night for first time. Following portion only read :—"I do not yet know which way I will come. How much longer could you hold out? From Maritzburg, from Buller." Commencement of message and date not read. Situation here unchanged; but enemy still mounting additional guns against some of our essential positions. I have provision for 70 days, and believe I can defend Ladysmith while they last. Hay or grazing is a difficulty; I have 35 days' supply of this at reduced ration. Small-arm ammunition, 5½ million; 15-pr. guns, 250 rounds per gun; 4·7-inch naval guns, 170 rounds per gun; 12-pr. naval guns, 270 rounds per gun; 6·3-inch howitzer, 430 rounds per gun. Enemy learns every plan of operations I form, and I cannot discover source. I have locked up or banished every suspect, but still have undoubted evidence of betrayal. Native deserters from enemy and our native scouts report enemy much disheartened by news of advance on Free State, victory on Mooi River, and consequent retirement north of Tugela River. With regard to road of advance towards Ladysmith, I could give most help to a force coming *viâ* Onderbrook Hotel or Springfield, but enemy is making his positions on that side stronger daily. If force south of Tugela can effect junction with me, I believe effect will be immediate and decisive. At present cannot go large as I am completely invested, and must reserve myself for one or two big efforts to co-operate with relief force. It will be the greatest help to Ladysmith if relief force maintains closest possible touch with enemy. Hospital return—wounded, 225; dysentery, 71; enteric, 15; other fevers, 12; other diseases, 109. Additional portion of message deciphered—"If you hear me attacking join in if you can." Please repeat entire message. I will keep a good look out and do all I can. Repeat General Clery.

From General Sir R. Buller to General Sir G. White.

(*Sent by messenger from Pietermaritzburg.*)

No. 58, 4th December. Your No. 20 P, 30th November, received. I shall have concentrated 4 brigades of Infantry, 5 batteries of Artillery, 1 regiment of Cavalry, 1,000 mounted Volunteers, by 6th December, and shall attack. I cannot yet say which route, but will (? communicate) with you in several cipher messages before I advance. I shall also send by searchlight messages in clear, but they will be false ones sent in order to deceive enemy.

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on 31 October, 2019

Correspondence between Sir R. Buller and Lord Roberts as to further attempt to relieve Ladysmith.

From General Sir R. Buller, Natal, to Field-Marshal Lord Roberts, Cape Town.

(*Received 26th January* 1900, 12.3 *a.m.*)

(Extract.)

No. 169. Sorry to say I find this morning garrison had abandoned Spion Kop in the night. They lost up there yesterday General Woodgate dangerously wounded, and 200 killed and about 300 wounded, mostly badly. I have gone over and assumed command, and am withdrawing the flank attack to Potgieter's Drift, which I shall reach morning 27th.

I mean to have one more try at Ladysmith, but fear that a great portion of the force is not in good spirits.

From Field-Marshal Lord Roberts, Cape Town, to General Sir R. Buller, Natal.

(Extract.) Cape Town, 26th January 1900.

Your No. 169. I am much concerned to hear that the Spion Kop position has been abandoned. Unless you feel fairly confident of being able to relieve Ladysmith from Potgieter's Drift, would it not be better to postpone the attempt until I am in the Orange Free State? Strenuous efforts are being made to collect transport, and I am hopeful of having sufficient to enable me to move on or about 5th February. If White can hold out and your position is secure, the presence of my force on the north of the Orange River should cause the enemy to lessen their hold on Natal, and thus make your task easier. Reports from Boer camp point to their being fagged and unable to cope with our Artillery fire. It seems therefore most desirable to maintain as bold a front as possible for the next 10 days.

From Field-Marshal Lord Roberts, Cape Town, to General Sir R. Buller, Natal.

(Extract.) Cape Town, 28th January 1900.

Please let me know exactly what your plan is for the next try to relieve Ladysmith, and about what date you think it would be possible to commence operations. I am deeply anxious that Ladysmith should be relieved, but unless you consider that you have a reasonable prospect of success, it would, I think, be infinitely better for many reasons for you to remain on the defensive behind the Tugela, until the operations I am about to undertake have produced the effect which I hope for. Early reply requested.

From General Sir R. Buller, Natal, to Field-Marshal Lord Roberts, Cape Town.

(Extract.) Spearman's Camp, 29th January 1900, 3.25 p.m.

My plan for next trial to relieve Ladysmith is to turn the Spion Kop position by the east, crossing the Tugela three times, and using a new drift just discovered, which makes all the difference by enabling me to reach a position I had hitherto considered inaccessible. I am only waiting for the Horse Artillery battery from India, and if it arrives I hope to attack Wednesday at 4 p.m.

The death rate in Ladysmith is now 8 to 10 a-day, and their hospital stores have run out, so delay is objectionable. I feel fairly confident of success this time, as I believe the enemy had a severe lesson last week, and are very disheartened, while we are all right.

One can never safely attempt to prophesy, but so far as my exertions can, humanly speaking, conduce to the desired end, I think I can promise you that I shall in no case compromise my force.

Please forward this to Secretary of State.

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on 31 October, 2019

From Lord Roberts, by letter, Cape Town, 26th January, 1900.

(Extract.)

I recognize what a very difficult operation you are now engaged in, and I should have been pleased beyond measure to hear that you had succeeded in relieving Ladysmith. You will now know from my telegram of to-day that, if you are not confident of forcing your way there, it would, in my opinion, be better that you should abandon the attempt, until I am in the Orange Free State, but I consider it is most desirable there should be no retirement from the line of the Tugela, for, as I mentioned in my telegram, reports from the Boer camp point to the enemy being harassed by the strain thrown on them, as they feel they are unable to cope with our artillery fire.

Letter to Lord Roberts, Spearman's Hill, 4th February 1900.

. . . . I have to-day received, per Captain Foot, your letter of the 26th January. . . . . White keeps a stiff upper lip, but some of those under him are desponding. He calculates he has now 7,000 effectives. They are eating their horses, and have very little else. He expects to be attacked in force this week, and though he affects to be confident I doubt if he really is. He has begged me to keep the enemy off him as much as I can, and I can only do this by pegging away. . . . . I do not think a move into the Free State will much affect our position here. . . . . If you would tell me how you propose to advance on Bloemfontein—from where that is—I should be better able to say what I could do.

The above extracts are published at the desire of Sir Redvers Buller, to explain the telegrams which follow:—

From Field-Marshal Lord Roberts to the Secretary of State for War.

(*Received 6th February,* 11.15 *p.m.*)

(Telegram.) Cape Town, 6th February 1900, 6.30 p.m.

Following received from Buller:—

"I have pierced the enemy's line after a fight lasting all of yesterday, without many casualties, and I now hold the hill which divides their position, and which will give me access to Ladysmith plain if I can advance. I shall then be 10 miles from White, with but one place for enemy to stand between us I must, however, drive back enemy either on my right or left to get my artillery and stores on to the plain. It is an operation which will cost from 2,000 to 3,000 men, and I am not confident though hopeful I can do it. The question is, how would such a loss affect your plans, and do you think the chance of the relief of Ladysmith worth the risk. It is the only possible way to relieve White, and if I give up this chance I know no other."

The following is my reply to Buller:—

Ladysmith must be relieved even at the loss you expect. I should certainly persevere, and my hope is that the enemy will be so severely punished as to enable you to withdraw White's garrison without great difficulty. Let troops know that in their hands is the honour of the Empire, and that of their success I have no possible doubt.